



"Live Aid for Burma: Alan Clements' Call to Awaken Global Conscience"

A Q&A with Alan Clements July 24, 2025

For the Release of *Conversation with a Dictator*:

A Challenge to the Authoritarian Assault

By Fergus Harlow, Director of the [Use Your Freedom Campaign](#)

What if a book could confront a dictator—and invite his redemption?

In [*Conversation with a Dictator: A Challenge to the Authoritarian Assault*](#), Alan Clements has written what may be one of the most daring works of literary resistance in recent memory—a 492-page illustrated novel that blends theatre, political philosophy, and sacred activism.

Structured as a five-act dialogue between a journalist and Myanmar's 2021 military coup leader, the book becomes both a moral reckoning and a cinematic exorcism of tyranny.

This interview goes behind the scenes of that creation.

From his time as a Buddhist monk in Burma to his decades-long relationship with Aung San Suu Kyi, Clements draws from a lifetime of inner and outer resistance.

Now, through the campaign at [UseYourFreedom.org](#), they are giving *Conversation with a Dictator*—along with personalized letters—to world leaders, influencers, and Nobel Peace Laureates.

[A global GoFundMe campaign](#) fuels the effort, sending 10 hardcover copies for every \$500 USD raised.

The goal? Not sales. Not outrage. But memory. Conscience. And a voice for those who can no longer speak.

Harlow: Alan, this book—*Conversation with a Dictator*—doesn't read like anything else. It's fiction, but not a novel. It's a confrontation, but staged as poetry. It's a theatre of conscience, a cinematic descent into the architecture of authoritarianism. How did it begin?

Clements: With silence. Not metaphorical silence—literal erasure. After the 2021 coup in Myanmar, the elected leaders were arrested. Aung San Suu Kyi—Nobel Peace Laureate, moral anchor of the country—was vanished into solitary confinement.

No press, no letters, no photographs. Not even her son has heard from her in over two years. It was as if the military didn't just want to jail her body—they wanted to obliterate her presence.

The world moved on. I could not.

This book is my refusal to look away. It's an act of sacred defiance, an invocation of moral imagination. And above all, it's a voice for those who can no longer speak.

Harlow: It's been called a "literary feature film for the conscience." The structure is theatrical—five acts between you, a journalist, and the dictator, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing. But it also feels like an exorcism. A kind of dream interrogation. Was that intentional?

Clements: Entirely. I didn't want to write another exposé. I wanted to enter the mind of power at its most delusional—where denial becomes dogma, where conscience is strangled by fear. The entire book could be read as the general interrogating himself in his final hour. A reckoning with the ghost of his own humanity.

The journalist might be me. Or he might be the last flicker of his suppressed conscience. What matters is that every page is a confrontation. A stripping away of masks. And ultimately, an invitation: to look tyranny in the eye and not flinch.

Harlow: And it's not just verbal. The book contains over 300 haunting black-and-white illustrations—children in ash, cathedrals of delusion, prisons of silence. What do the images do that the words cannot?

Clements: Dictatorship is not just a political system—it's an emotional weather system. It warps perception, hollows memory, makes cruelty mundane. Words alone cannot capture that.

So, I turned to images—to rupture the rational. Each illustration is an ethical pulse. A visceral shorthand for things that language can only circle. Grief. Denial. Collapse. Defiance.

Aung San Suu Kyi appears often—but wordlessly. As lotus, as shadow, as presence. She becomes the visual conscience of the book. Silenced in body, but visually sovereign.

Harlow: Let's talk about Aung San Suu Kyi. She never speaks in the book, yet she is its soul. Why keep her silent?

Clements: Because that's the truth. She's been held in complete isolation for five years. She hasn't spoken publicly since 2021. Her silence is both forced and profound.

I wanted the reader to feel that—to feel what it means to be erased and yet remain indomitable. Aung San Suu Kyi doesn't need to speak in the book. Her dignity suffuses every scene. Her silence is the book's heartbeat. Its moral weight.

In real life, she can't write. So, this book becomes her proxy—her voice resurrected in imagination, shaped by memory, and offered to the world as a literary prayer.

Harlow: You were a Buddhist monk in Burma before becoming a *Dhamma* teacher and then a journalist. You've trained in insight meditation with Mahasi Sayadaw and Sayadaw U Pandita. Does this spiritual foundation inform your political activism?

Clements: Completely. In the West, mindfulness is often diluted into a lifestyle app. But in the Burmese tradition, it's radical. To be present is to be dangerous—because presence reveals everything we try to hide.

Mindfulness shows how fear metastasizes into ideology. How hatred becomes an institution. How self-deception becomes law.

So yes, the book is political—but also spiritual. It's an act of bearing witness. Of refusing to turn away. And of holding power accountable with the deepest tools we have—truth, compassion, and inner clarity.

Harlow: And now, we've launched a global campaign — UseYourFreedom.org — to give this book to world leaders, influencers, Nobel laureates. Why gift it? Why not just sell it?

Clements: Because this isn't a commercial project. It's a sacred transmission. A strategic act of creative activism.

Imagine U.S. President Donald Trump, or Robert F. Kennedy Jr., or the Dalai Lama holding this book in their hands. Reading its opening lines. Seeing Aung San Suu Kyi in image. Receiving a personal letter asking them—not to fight, but to feel.

To remember.

We believe one book, gifted at the right moment, can crack a wall of indifference. We've seen it happen. Mandela's letters moved nations. Liu Xiaobo's silence galvanized a global movement. Aung San Suu Kyi has no letters—but this book can speak on her behalf.

Harlow: The GoFundMe campaign is ambitious. For every \$500 raised, ten hardcover copies are shipped to key figures worldwide—with a personalized letter. What's the deeper goal?

Clements: To rehumanize. To restore consciousness.

We live in an era of algorithmic forgetting. Of dopamine distraction. Of aestheticized suffering. This book disrupts that. It refuses to be scrolled past. It asks—begs—the reader to slow down, to feel, to remember what's at stake.

And the letters we send are hand-written, direct, sometimes raw. They say: "Please, use your freedom to promote theirs." Just as Aung San Suu Kyi once said.

We're not begging. We're invoking.

Harlow: There's a striking analogy you've made between this project and Live Aid. Could you share how that global moment of conscience informs your campaign for Burma?

Clements: Live Aid was not just a concert—it was a mass awakening. In 1985, the images of famine in Ethiopia cracked open the world's heart. Music became a weapon of conscience. The stage became a cathedral of empathy.

Burma needs that kind of seismic shift today. We don't have stadiums, but we have this book—a theatre of conscience, each page a song of defiance, each image a drumbeat for freedom.

Like Live Aid, it's about collective will—uniting artists, leaders, and ordinary people to say: *We will not look away. We will not forget. We will amplify the silenced.*

This book is not a charity plea. It's a moral alarm bell. And if enough of us hear it, Burma's cry will echo like a chorus no dictator can silence.

Harlow: And yet, as you say, this is not just about Burma. It's about all of us.

Clements: Yes. Burma is the prism—but the light it refracts is universal.

From Tehran to Texas, from Beijing to Brussels, we are all living through the metastasis of authoritarianism. It's digital, ideological, and economic. It whispers in our schools, our screens, our algorithms.

This book is named after him. Strip it. Dissects its psychology. And ultimately, imagines the one thing tyranny cannot fathom: redemption. The possibility that even a dictator might awaken.

Harlow: That's one of the most radical ideas in the book. That the dictator isn't just confronted—but offered a path out. A kind of grace.

Clements: That's the *Dhamma*. That's *Ubuntu*. That's Aung San Suu Kyi.

We don't defeat tyranny by becoming tyrannical. We outgrow it. We transcend it. We expose its futility by embodying what it fears most: truth, humility, and love.

This is why the book ends—not with revenge—but with an open hand.

Harlow: Final question, Alan. If the world were listening—truly listening—what would you say, right now?

Clements: That now is the time to act.

There are 22,000 political prisoners in Burma. Some were tortured. Some were executed. Some are just children. And Aung San Suu Kyi—80 years old—is somewhere in a concrete cell, perhaps dead, perhaps holding on.

This book is not entertainment. It is a reckoning. It is the voice of a people under siege. It is the soul of a woman whose silence dares us to remember her.

So, if you're reading this—give. Share. Gift the book. Join the campaign. Speak truth in your own way.

Because the only thing more dangerous than tyranny is forgetting it ever happened.

Let this be our moment—not of despair, but of creative defiance. Not bombs. Not hashtags. But books. Letters. Conscience. Let our resistance be sacred.

Alan Clements is the author of [*Conversation with a Dictator: A Challenge to the Authoritarian Assault*](#), as well as *The Voice of Hope* with Aung San Suu Kyi. A former Buddhist monk, he is one of the earliest Westerners ordained in the Burmese tradition, and has spent four decades engaged in Burma's freedom movement through journalism, activism, and spiritual inquiry.

Fergus Harlow is Director of the [UseYourFreedom.org GoFundMe Campaign](#), co-author of *Aung San Suu Kyi: From Prison and a Letter to a Dictator*, and a lead organizer of the global campaign to free Aung San Suu Kyi and Burma's 22,000 political prisoners.

